

Michigan  
Department  
of Human  
Services

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394

\*DHS cited in stories

# Articles in Today's Clips

**Monday, November 3, 2008**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

---

Subject	Page
Adoption	2-4
DHS miscellaneous*	5-11
Heating	12-14
Medicaid	15-16

## Adoption 'Angels' earn congressional honor for helping children in need

Posted by [destep](#) November 03, 2008 06:45AM



Press Photo/Hollyn JohnsonRuthann and Fred

Odren and five of their children -- from left, Victor, 10; Dakota, 8; Jeremiah, 9; Shelby, 15; and Jon, 9. The younger four children are adopted.

ALPINE TOWNSHIP -- Nine carved pumpkins sat on the back deck as an assortment of costumed kids ran around out front. It was a busy Halloween for the Odren clan.

But things might slow down for a moment near Christmas.

"Our family can do the whole nativity" at church, Fred Odren said.

Fred and Ruthann Odren over the years have made room in their home to foster more than 40 special needs children, and have adopted five of them. The family was to be honored today by U.S. Rep. Vernon Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, with a congressional Angels in Adoption Award.

The annual program recognizes people nationwide for giving permanent homes to children in need. Zeeland residents Christa and Rob Murphy were honored in September by U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra, R-Holland, for adopting an HIV-positive boy from Zambia.

D.A. Blodgett for Children nominated the Odren family, which includes five biological children -- a son, 27, and four daughters ages 15 to 25 -- and five adopted children -- a daughter, 21, and four sons ages 8 to 10.



Press Photo/Hollyn Johnson Ruthann Odren comforts her son Jon, 9, while watching her other adopted and foster children play in her front yard.

While five of the older children have moved out, nine children -- including four foster children -- live in the family's home. That's also how many bicycles sit on a rack outside the front door.

And with closet space at a premium, racks of clothing line the walls of bedrooms.

"You think the house is crazy, but when there's nobody here, it's too quiet," said Fred Odren, 47, who works at the General Motors stamping plant in Wyoming. "Somebody's gotta do it. I think God picked this path for us."

But then, "who else would pick this for somebody," Ruthann Odren said.

Ruthann, 46, grew into the role. Her parents, Doug and Marie Lockard, of Sparta, have been foster parents for almost 40 years, and still have five teenage boys in their home.

"This is all I know. (Fred) got rigged into it by default," Ruthann Odren said. "Some kids just fit into your family. Some kids, it just feels like they shouldn't leave."

"My house isn't perfect. It isn't spotless. But my kids are happy, and they're well taken care of, and they're nice, and that's what I care about."

Ehlers praised the Odrens, calling them an inspiration by being "devoted to helping children in need reach their highest potential."

One of the boys was born premature and the 9-year-old twins are developmentally delayed.

Shelby Odren, 15, helps care for a 17-month-old foster child, while another must be taken to the hospital every other day for care of burn wounds.

As Ruthann Odren sees it, she and Fred are just being parents.

"(Parenting) is what everybody should be doing," she said.

The family was honored last month at a White House gala in Washington. Later, Fred Odren learned his GM job of

more than 25 years soon will be gone.

His stable job was one reason the family was able to adopt so many children..

"It's been an up-and-down month for me. A lot of things are up in question marks right now," Odren said. "We get a lot of personal satisfaction out of helping the children. It brings a lot of happiness and takes your mind off what's going on."

E-mail the author of this story: [localnews@grpress.com](mailto:localnews@grpress.com)

Categories: [Featured](#)

## Comments

Footer

October 31, 2008

## Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board celebrates 30th anniversary

*Michigan Department of Human Services  
Reader Submitted*



Courtesy photo

**Speakers at the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board event included Board chair and District Court Judge Amy Krause (in red).**

District Court Judge Amy Krause hosted a Domestic Violence Awareness Month event in her Lansing City Hall court room Thursday, Oct. 30.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm proclaimed October Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Michigan. Thursday's event also marked the 30th anniversary of the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board. Judge Krause chairs the board.

“Our passion is great,” she said. “Our dedication is tireless. Our collective spirit is unbreakable. Together we will continue moving full speed ahead toward the day when domestic and sexual violence is no longer a part of Michigan and its great people.”

Program participants also included: Susan Shoultz, executive director of End Violent Encounters (EVE), a Lansing domestic violence shelter; Rina Risper, a domestic violence survivor; and Karen Porter, quality assurance director for the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board.

The board is appointed by the governor and charged with efforts to reduce domestic violence in the state. It is housed within the Michigan Department of Human Services and administers state and federal funding for domestic violence shelters and advocacy services, develops and recommends policy, and develops and provides technical assistance and training.

Judge Krause reviewed the history of the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board since its inception in 1978 and closed her remarks with a call for a renewed commitment to increased awareness of, and improved community responses to, domestic and sexual violence.

For more information, please visit the DHS Web site at [www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence](http://www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence)



November 1, 2008

## Children's Home board votes to close facility

*BY CHRISTINA HALL  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER*

Children's Home of Detroit is closing the residential program at its Grosse Pointe Woods' campus, probably by Nov. 30. Officials cite the small number of children in the program and economics as two reasons.

The state Department of Human Services has 30 days to place the program's 28 children. Children's Home will care for them until they have been placed, said Bill Steele, executive director. The children range from 8 to 17 years old.

The group's board of trustees voted unanimously Thursday to close the program for behaviorally- and emotionally-challenged children. Many of the 75 staff members will be laid off.

The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children will continue to operate.

Officials' immediate concern is the children's safe transition. Steele said the intent always is to place them in the county where they have family. Wayne County primarily will be the county of choice.

Steele said the focus on community-based services, low occupancy and the economic crisis contributed to the decision. He said the program could handle 75 to 90 children at a time and the board has been struggling with the issue for several months.

"We could no longer responsibly continue to operate that program," he said. "We had to take a look at managing the assets that were remaining, to look at options for the future."

The decision came less than a year after the board closed a residential program in Warren. Steele said that 5-acre site at Van Dyke and Chicago is for sale. The board has not made a decision about the 13-acre campus in Grosse Pointe Woods.

Contact **CHRISTINA HALL** at 586-826-7265 or [chall@freepress.com](mailto:chall@freepress.com).

---



Saturday, November 1, 2008

**Grosse Pointe Woods**

## Changing times close children's home

### State treatment policy shifts, tough economy too much for facility that dates to 1836.

**Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News**

**GROSSE POINTE WOODS** -- A Grosse Pointe Woods children's home that has provided treatment for troubled children for 172 years will be shuttered at the end of November, a result of the state's shifting priorities for residential treatment of children and the economy.

The board of trustees of the Children's Home of Detroit voted Thursday to shutter the facility, which houses 5-to-17-year-olds in cottages on a 13-acre country-like campus. The home can house about 90 children; it has 28 children in residence, said Executive Director William Steele.

The state is placing fewer children in residential treatment settings partly because of the settlement of a lawsuit brought by the New York City-based child advocacy group Children's Rights. The group sued Michigan over poor treatment of children in foster care that resulted in several deaths.

"It's no different than the stories you're hearing about businesses that have to downsize or go out of business," Steele said. "The economy has certainly drained some of those resources we had available for operations.

"That, coupled with the low occupancy and the uncertainty about the direction of care for children, has combined to make it necessary for us to close."

Under terms of the lawsuit settlement, which took effect Oct. 24, the state Department of Human Services agreed to place children in the least restrictive setting possible, said Jack Kresnak, president of the nonprofit advocacy group Michigan's Children.

"The gist of the settlement was there would be a movement to get kids out of institutions and into family homes as soon as possible," Kresnak said. "It's been very abrupt for institutions that deal with very troubled children."

The home was founded in Detroit in 1836 as a place for children orphaned in widespread cholera epidemics. The institution moved to then-rural Grosse Pointe in the 1950s, because it was believed children would benefit from being out in the country.

Funding for the home comes from a combination of state funds, private grants and individual donations, Steele said. But donations have fallen, he said.



The home's focus right now is on finding appropriate placements, Steele added. Depending on their circumstances, children will be returned home, to foster care or, if necessary, to other treatment programs or hospitals.

"They're going to be in an environment where they have 24-hour care, and their basic needs will all be met," Steele said. "They will not go to an environment where they will be given less."

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.detroitnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081101/METRO01/811010391>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright 2008 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.



November 2, 2008

## Simpson is new foster care manager

LANSING — Lesley Simpson has been promoted to the position of foster care program manager for the Lansing office of Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM). She has been program manager for the organization's Family Reunification program in Lansing since it opened in November 2007, and she will continue to manage LSSM's Families First contract in Barry and Eaton Counties.

Families First is an intensive, in-home program for families who have a child at risk of being removed from the home due to abuse or neglect. The Family Reunification program, provided through the Michigan Department of Human Resources, seeks to successfully reunite children with their families and prevent repeated foster care placements.

For more information about LSSM, visit the Web site at [www.LSSM.org](http://www.LSSM.org) and register for the free e-newsletter.

— *From LSSM*

---



## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Child-welfare training center wins \$1.2M grant

Sunday, November 02, 2008

#### Kalamazoo

##### Gazette Staff Reports

KALAMAZOO -- A Western Michigan University center that trains child-welfare professionals to assess and help young victims of abuse or other trauma has won a \$1.2 million federal grant.

This is the second \$1 million-plus grant that WMU's Southwest Michigan Children's Trauma Assessment Center has received from the National Institutes of Health.

The center has trained some 8,000 people and treated some 1,900 kids since its inception nine years ago, according to James Henry, center director and WMU associate professor of social work.

As a result of the latest grant, service providers will be trained in therapies designed and researched for use with traumatized and maltreated children.

Henry said the center works with the Michigan Department of Human Services, community mental-health agencies, school systems and family courts.

The federal funding is intended to help improve child-welfare practices in the counties of Cass, Charlevoix, Hillsdale, Kalamazoo, Kent, Livingston, Marquette and Wayne, as well as tribal courts in Mount Pleasant and Manistee.

For more information, contact Henry at 387-7073 or visit [www.wmich.edu/hhs/unifiedclinics/ctac/index.htm](http://www.wmich.edu/hhs/unifiedclinics/ctac/index.htm).

©2008

© 2008 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com)

[See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)

[Order a reprint of this article now](#)

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**  
WSJ.com

BUSINESS | NOVEMBER 3, 2008

# More Utility Bills Go Unpaid

*Consumers' Economic Struggles Spur More Power Shutoffs as Firms Step Up Collections*

By REBECCA SMITH

Utilities are becoming more aggressive about collecting money from delinquent customers, leading to a surge in service shutdowns just as economic woes are pushing up the number of households falling behind on bills.

The utilities say they are under pressure to clean out accounts that are weighing down their books at a time when their stocks are being hammered and earnings growth has slowed.

Meanwhile, the increasing number of homes left without power -- which could rise as economic pain deepens -- is beginning to worry some consumer advocates and regulators.

In Pennsylvania, [PPL Corp.](#) increased shutoffs by 78% in the first three quarters of the year compared with the same period a year earlier. Shutoffs at electric utilities throughout the state increased by 20% in that period. George Lewis, a spokesman for PPL, based in Allentown, Pa., said the utility had been somewhat lax in the past but decided this year to "reverse the trend and prevent people from getting further in debt" by cutting them off sooner. About 3% of the company's residential accounts have been disconnected for delinquency.

In Memphis, Tenn., the city-owned utility that supplies electricity, natural gas and water to residents cut off 38% more people in the first eight months of the year, or 69,743 electric accounts, versus the same period in 2007. The utility raised electricity rates 20% this year, reflecting increased wholesale power costs for energy. Chris Stanley, a spokesman from the company, Memphis Light, Gas & Water, said the number of accounts owing more than \$900 that were 90 days or more past due was up 148% to 1,766 accounts as of Oct. 28.

The increased number of shutoffs has attracted the attention of some regulators. Dian Grueneich, a member of the California Public Utilities Commission who has responsibility for low-income programs, has begun asking utilities to furnish information on shutoff criteria. She wants commission staff to "take a look and make sure it is being applied fairly."

One bright spot is that many utilities will have more money to distribute next year to poor customers through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Congress boosted the program's funds for the current fiscal year by 78% to \$5.1 billion. Many utilities are trying to get the word out that people

should apply because eligibility rules have been expanded, allowing people with higher incomes to qualify.

State regulators say they have noticed that power shutoffs have moved up the economic chain. "We're seeing an uptick in middle-class people who have never been in this situation before," said Eric Hartsfield, director of the customer-service division of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities.

New Jersey's biggest utility company, [Public Service Enterprise Group Inc.](#), said it saw a 10% increase compared with the year earlier in uncollectible natural-gas accounts, and slightly less on the electric side, in the third quarter. "We've been diligent in our shutoff activities," said PSEG Chief Executive Ralph Izzo.

Rising delinquencies are occurring across the country. In New York, the amount of money utilities are owed on accounts at least 60 days past due jumped 22%, to \$611.3 million in September compared with a year earlier, according to regulators.

Michigan has experienced a nearly 39% increase in electricity disconnections this year compared with last, according to statistics filed voluntarily by utilities with state regulators.

The rise comes as utilities are finding it more difficult to fund their operations.

[Northeast Utilities](#), which owns electric and gas utilities in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, is carrying about \$15 million of unpaid bills currently, up from about \$11 million this time last year and about \$8 million in 2006. "We're putting more resources into collecting on accounts now," said Chief Financial Officer David McHale.

In the third quarter, PECO Corp., a Philadelphia utility, racked up an additional \$37 million of bad-debt expenses from unpaid bills compared with the third quarter of 2007, bringing its total unpaid balance to \$56 million.

The company has put in place a new service-termination strategy this year that for the first time assesses credit risk, and pulls together other information used as a basis for decisions. "We ask how old, how big and how risky" an account is when prioritizing disconnections, said Denis O'Brien, president of PECO, a unit of Chicago-based [Exelon Corp.](#)

The number of shutoffs could rise further, as new technologies such as digital meters make it easier for utilities to cut off late-paying customers.

Digital meters allow power companies to do things remotely that previously required sending out work crews. For example, utilities can take meter readings wirelessly and switch a customer's power off or on without having to send a crew to a house. They also can use a "service limiter" feature to cut power flows to a trickle until customers pay up. Utilities are installing millions of these meters across the U.S.

Southern California Edison, a unit of [Edison International](#) of Rosemead, Calif., currently disconnects late-paying customers owing as little as \$30, but that could drop lower in the future. That usually would be a money-losing proposition, because it requires a crew to be sent out to disconnect service manually. But the company is in the process of installing 5.3 million digital meters, at a cost of \$1.63 billion, which will allow remote, wireless shutoffs, making it economical to take action even for tiny amounts owed. In a recent filing with regulators it said it could adopt "rigid enforcement" of payment rules in the future for those owing less than \$30. It hypothesized it could cut off an additional 129,000 people a year.

Lynda Ziegler, senior vice president of customer service at SoCal Edison, said the utility doesn't have enough wireless meters to support a policy change yet. She added that notification requirements mean it still could take nearly three months to sever a delinquent account. But she said the utility may seek authority from the Public Utilities Commission in the future to act more quickly or to convert certain customers to prepaid service because "one of the struggles people have is catching up when they get behind."

The ease with which utilities can use digital meters to cut off service has alarmed some consumer advocates. "Just because you can do it doesn't mean you should do it," said Irwin Popowsky, head of the Office of Consumer Advocate in Pennsylvania. "From my perspective, they're creating a reason to not have smart meters."

**Write to** Rebecca Smith at [rebecca.smith@wsj.com](mailto:rebecca.smith@wsj.com)

Copyright 2008 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com)



## MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 212, VOLUME 47-- FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31 2008

### **AUDIT: D.C.H. DIDN'T PROPERLY DOCUMENT \$58 MILLION IN FEDERAL EXPENDITURES**

While the Department of Community Health spent most of the \$11.8 billion in federal awards under its control in fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2007, auditors this week questioned \$57.9 million paid out by the department because those expenses lacked internal control or proper documentation to ensure the payments complied with state and federal guidelines, a financial [report](#) by the auditor general said on Friday.

Auditors said that in 10 out of the 11 federal programs the department oversees, it could have practiced better control over financial reporting procedures, cash handling and data entry, which would have reasonably assured the DCH and auditors that records were accurate and in compliance.

Besides those issues, however, auditors opined that the DCH largely complied with all of the other regulations in federal and state law.

Kelly Niebel, a spokesperson with DCH, agreed saying that though the identified \$54 million is a large amount, it should be looked at relative to the large amount of money the DCH spent in the audit period.

"This was overwhelmingly a positive audit," she said. "(The DCH takes) great pride in being good stewards of the resources provided to us and we're always looking to improve," Ms. Niebel said, adding that the department has taken action on many of the items in the audit and work is in progress on many of the others.

The 188-page report outlined examples where the DCH may have overspent or didn't properly document expenses because of a lack of internal controls in several programs, including disproportionate share hospital payments, which it said were sometimes based on outdated information and for pharmacy rebates, which it said needed better data on which to base rebate amounts.

The department also needs to improve its invoice system for Medicaid expenses under the Medicare parts A and B programs, ensuring that billed premium amounts are reasonable based on information in the DCH's system, the report said.

Medicaid expenditures for Medicare Part A and B totaled more than \$554 million for the two-year period covered by the review, which ended September 30, 2007.

Included in the total questioned expenditures made by the department is \$11.7 million from the Women, Infants and Children supplemental program, which auditors said represents 621,000 coupons that were redeemed without proper supporting documentation.

The report also said the department should improve its process for getting reimbursed by the federal government, since it didn't request reimbursement for \$10.8 million by the audit period and was late in requesting payback on \$354,000, so forfeited that amount from the state's coffers.